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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NEW DELHI 000948

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IAEA](#) [KNNP](#) [KISL](#) [KDEM](#) [SCUL](#) [IN](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAN'S ANTI-US COLD WAR FALLS FLAT IN INDIA

REF: A. NEW DELHI 888

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 803

[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 552

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Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. India's IAEA Iran vote, the Danish cartoons, and the POTUS visit are reverberating on the Indian political scene, provoking Indian Muslim leaders and activists to speak out. On the domestic front, however, the Congress-dominated UPA government has begun to act on the promises made to Muslims when it came to power in 2004, establishing a Ministry of Minority Affairs and moving to restore the "minority status" of the historic Aligarh Muslim University. Our Muslim contacts assert that Iran and anti-Congress politicians are attempting to use this confluence of emotional issues to stir unhappiness, spending liberally to create an anti-US, anti-UPA nexus among India's Muslims. Influential Muslims relate that the Iranian Embassy has offered them financial and other inducements to participate in America-bashing events. India's Muslims have shown little interest in these campaigns and there is growing irritation with the aggressive lobbying of Iranian diplomats, compromised Urdu journalists and newspapers, extremist fellow-travellers and opportunistic politicians. While there may be considerable sums of money changing hands, in the end all the sound and fury may not produce much, as most Muslims tell us they are satisfied with the current government in New Delhi, take seriously UPA efforts to address their concerns, and are content to give the GOI a free hand to conduct foreign affairs in India's best interests. End Summary.

Pressures Lead to Polarization

12. (C) A confluence of foreign policy issues, including the GOI's stance at the IAEA, the worldwide reaction against the publication of cartoons deemed offensive to Muslims, and the upcoming visit of President Bush have become a focus of attention among India's Muslim community. According to our contacts, the Iranian government and Indian opposition politicians are encouraging Muslims to become involved in street protests and make statements that will hurt or embarrass the US, the UPA government and Congress. Our Muslim contacts tell of overtures to Muslim leaders by the Iranian Embassy to participate in a broad range of anti-US activities, complete with generous financial inducements. This is leading to increasing polarization of Indian Muslims, as the face off to support or oppose the pro-Iranian, anti-US measures. Despite their access to generous funds, the Iranians and their supporters are finding their program to be a tough sell, as Indian Muslims -- both Sunni and Shia -- are increasingly suspicious of Iran and reluctant to alienate what they perceive to be a friendly UPA government in New Delhi.

Views of a Prominent Maulvi

13. (C) In a February 1 meeting with Poloff prominent Maulvi, Islamic publisher and Chairman of the National Minorities Development Corporation Qari Mohammed Mian Mazhari described the current state of play among Indian Muslims as a battle between Saudi Arabia and Iran for leadership of the Muslim world. Mazhari noted that South Asia with its enormous Muslim population is the big prize and the two contenders are

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pulling out all stops to get Indian Muslims on their side. On February 6, Poloff met with Imam Syed Ahmed Bukhari, the Imam of New Delhi's Jamma Mosque, who shared many of the same concerns. We note that King Abdullah just paid a visit to India, the first in 50 years by a Saudi monarch (Ref B), lending credence to the Muslim perception of a Saudi charm offensive.

Congress Reaches Out to Muslims

14. (C) The Congress-dominated UPA has begun to make good on election promises to address Muslim concerns in an effort to recruit Muslims back into the party. These measures have included the establishment of a Ministry of Minority Affairs, the promise to restore the "minority status" of the historic Aligarh Muslim University, and measures aimed at alleviating rural poverty. These efforts have yet to make a serious impression on the Muslim community, with most Muslims waiting to see how they are implemented. The Congress campaign has angered the Samajwadi Party (SP) which currently rules Uttar Pradesh (UP), however, as it undercuts the SP "vote bank," at a time when the party is in serious political trouble (see Ref C).

Minorities Ministry is a Non-Starter

15. (C) Islamic publisher Mazhari dismissed Congress promises of a Minority Affairs Ministry, asking rhetorically whether the 18 percent of the Indian population that are not Hindu will receive access to 18 percent of the national budget. Until the Ministry's powers are clearly defined and it is properly funded, he emphasized, the new office will be a mere publicity stunt. Mazhari suggested that the Ministry should become the central clearing house for all Muslim programs, especially education, which he asserted is the Muslims Community's principal concern, and the Ministry should absorb all public sector programs aimed at craftsman, hand-loom

operators and the textile industry, where many workers are Muslims. He pointed out that the initial signs are not good, as the Ministry has no office space and no budget. He predicted that there will be a bureaucratic turf war and that other Ministries will eviscerate the new Ministry, while the already existing Minorities Commission will fight to retain its power and prerogatives. Sikhs, Christians and other minorities are also clamoring for the new Ministry's attention, although the bulk of its focus will necessarily be on Muslims, who are 148 million strong.

Differing Views on Iran

16. (C) Mazhari maintained that Indian Muslims are suspicious about US intentions regarding Iran and this has effected US relations with the entire Muslim world. He urged the US to take a long view and build a proper coalition of Muslim and non-Muslim states. The real job, he insisted, will consist of quiet diplomacy behind the scenes. Mazhari lamented that the US appears to be acting randomly without a plan of action, leading to an over-reliance on the language of confrontation and creating needless problems. He insisted that it would not be hard for the US to win-over Indian Muslims on the Iran issue as it is not a big concern for them. He predicted that Indian Muslims will not object to the GOI vote against Iran in the IAEA, declaring that they

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are more interested in what is happening in Palestine and how Hamas has come to power there than in the bellicose statements of the Iranian Ayatollahs. Imam Bukhari and his media advisor, Anis Jamaee of the United News of India, maintained that the GOI position on Iran in the IAEA is not "sensitive" for Indian Sunnis, while Iraq is a make or break issue. They claimed that Indian Sunnis are more concerned about the treatment of Saddam Hussein and do not want to see him humiliated or tried in a kangaroo court.

Iranian Meddling with Indian Muslims

17. (C) Mazhari echoed the sentiments of other Muslim contacts, deriding Iranian interference in Indian domestic affairs. He complained that the Iranian Embassy is funding a new Urdu daily "Shahafat" in New Delhi that will come out with anti-US diatribes just prior to the POTUS visit, and that Teheran is already providing lavish funding to "Hindustan," a leading Urdu daily in Mumbai. Our contacts assert that "Shahafat" will serve as the mouthpiece of anti-US Shia cleric Kalbe Jawaad and that Teheran has budgeted approximately USD 150,000 to get the paper up and running. Mazhari complained that "Shahafat is just the tip of the iceberg," as Iran hopes to establish up to 350 anti-US Urdu and Hindi publications in India and has budgeted 10 million rupees (USD 200,000) for this project. Asserting that Iran is conducting a "cold war" against the US, he pointed to a long-term Iranian plan to paint the US as "anti-Muslim" and urged the USG to come up with its own plan to counter Teheran's machinations.

18. (C) Bukhari is sponsoring a March 18 conference on "Islam and Indian Democracy," which will take place at the Jamma Masjid. Our contacts have asserted that the Iranian Embassy offered to fund the meeting if Bukhari changed it to an anti-American conclave that condemned the President's visit to India. He told Poloff that he refused the Iranian offer, responding that the US President is a state guest of the Government of India and should be treated cordially, emphasizing that Muslims should view the visit as an opportunity politely to make their concerns known to the USG. The conference will now avoid international issues altogether and deal only with domestic concerns.

19. (C) Mazhari confirmed that he had been invited to address a Muslim seminar on "Islam and World Peace" to which up to 20

diplomats from Muslim countries were invited. He asked the organizers what the agenda of the seminar would be and was told to focus on "criticizing the US on the Iran/IAEA issue."

Several of the invited diplomats purportedly told Mazhari they were unaware of the anti-US agenda and would never have attended if they had known. He claimed that the seminar too was funded by the Iranian Embassy.

Unhappy with the King Abdullah Visit

¶10. (C) Bukhari pointed out that Indian Muslims were very upset with the way the GOI handled the recent visit of Saudi King Abdullah, as he was not allowed to meet with Indian Muslim leaders. He claimed that King Abdullah had offered to provide funds directly to the Jamma Mosque management for its repair and restoration, before being convinced (unclear by whom) that the money should be given to the GOI through the Archeological Survey of India (ASI). To date, the GOI has

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not contacted the Imam about the restoration plan nor informed him of the status of the donation. Bukhari did not want the same thing to happen during the Bush visit, as it would anger and antagonize many Muslims. Mazhari was also upset that the GOI had "failed to capitalize" on the Saudi King's visit by keeping him away from his fellow Muslims.

Comment: Iran's Cold War Fizzling in India

¶11. (C) The conjunction of the Iran decision, the publication of the Danish cartoons and the impending POTUS visit and stepped-up Congress attempts to recruit Muslims have produced unusual ferment in the Indian Muslim community.

Muslim contacts complain that Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and his henchman Amar Singh are trying to stir trouble by adding their weight to the anti-US agitation.

The Samajwadi Party is under siege by Congress and hopes to use Muslim concerns to put New Delhi on the defensive. While Muslim leaders are eagerly debating these issues, (with some accepting easy money from Iran or Saudi Arabia), the Muslim man on the street is largely oblivious. The Iran IAEA debate and other complex international issues are too esoteric and too removed from the daily concerns of Indian Muslims to generate much heat. Most Indian Muslims tell us they are satisfied with the current government and do not want to return to the bad old days of the Hindutva-focussed NDA. Recent polling data bears out this impression. Most local Muslims view Iran with suspicion and do not want to alienate the Indian government. They are largely content to let the GOI deal with Iran and provide a cordial reception to the US President. While Iran would certainly like to recruit Indian Muslims to its cause, they may find that their money is not well-spent in India.

¶12. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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